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May 2016 Japan's No.1 English Magazine  
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**Animal Planet: Zootopia** creators tell their tails

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8F Nishi-Azabu Sonic Bldg, 3-2-12 Nishi-Azabu,  
Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0031 Tel 03-4588-2277  
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**METROPOLIS**

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**Neil Butler**  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

**EDITORIAL** Martin Leroux (EDITOR) Akira Davis (EDITORIAL ASSISTANT) Tim Young (PROOFREADER) **CONTRIBUTING EDITORS** Dan Grunebaum (ENTERTAINMENT) Don Morton (MOVIES) C.B. Liddell (ARTS) Samuel Thomas (FASHION) **DESIGN** Davi Azevedo (ART DIRECTOR) **WEB** Minh Douangprachanh (DIGITAL MANAGER) Thomas Beecher (WEB EDITOR) Vandana Nim (DIGITAL ASSISTANCE) **PRODUCTION** Helen Langford (PRODUCTION ASSISTANT) **ADVERTISING** Akane Ochi, Karl Nakashima, Niki Kaihara (SALES MANAGERS) Lisa Kanai (ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES) **ADMINISTRATION/ACCOUNTING** Keiko Adachi (ADMINISTRATION MANAGER)



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[editor@metropolisjapan.com](mailto:editor@metropolisjapan.com)



# TO-DO LIST

Check full event listings in the WATCHLIST online!  
<http://metropolisjapan.com/watchlist>



## MAY 3-4 KONNO HACHIMAN SHIBUYARYU OMATO

For the first time in 500 years, Shibuya's Konno Hachimangu Shrine will be reenacting the Shibuya-style longbow archery ceremony, "omato." While Shibuya has gained international prominence as Tokyo's entertainment capital, lesser known is the ward's rich, venerable history that spans over 1,000 years. The town was named after the noble Shibuya clan, the caste lords of the now-defunct Shibuya Castle, built during the Kanji Era (A.D. 1092). The bloodline continues to this day, and among the descendants of the clan are none other than Admiral Heihachiro Togo. The reenactment of this long-held family tradition will be using the *hamaya* (demon-breaking arrow) literally, which is believed to ward off misfortune and attract good luck. **May 3-4, 1-3pm. Konno Hachimangu Shrine.** ☞ Shibuya, <http://tinyurl.com/konnohachiman> (Japanese)

August Vilella, *The Birthday*, oil on canvas, Barcelona 2015



## MAY 7-8 AUGUST VILELLA SOLO EXHIBITION

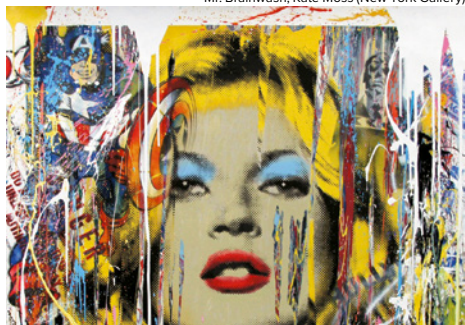
What truly distinguishes August Vilella from his contemporaries is his work's genuine, impromptu nature. Instead of preparing sketches and working on preconceived ideas, the Barcelona-based artist relies purely on his intuition when creating his work, and the end result is unknown until the work is completed. The young Spanish surrealist calls this process the "surreal intuitive method." Each of these artworks came straight from his heart and mind. Vilella's oil painting centers around elegantly-rendered magical creatures with large, protruding eyes, each evoking empathy and deep emotions. Villa's artwork is conceived purely by his imagination, and this unmissable exhibition gives a glimpse into the artist's subconscious. **May 7-8. 3331 Arts Chiyoda.** ☞ Sue-Hirocho. Tel: 03-6803-2441. [www.augustvilella.com/en](http://www.augustvilella.com/en)



## MAY 7-31 SPRING ROSE FESTIVAL

The post-Meiji Restoration period saw an increasing prevalence of Western culture, setting the foundation of modern Japan. Needless to say, the European influence experienced during the Meiji Period continued during the Taisho Era, and the Kyu Furukawa Gardens' vintage exterior symbolizes the marriage of Western and Japanese cultures of the time. The gardens are also renowned for their florals, and during springtime get covered in a sea of roses. Particularly scenic is the sight of Banksia roses covering the walls of the mansion. Throughout May, Kyu Furukawa Garden will be open to the public for its annual Spring Rose Festival, where visitors can feast their eyes on 180 roses of over 90 varieties, while travelling back in time to enjoy the chic, vintage atmosphere of Taisho-era Japan. **May 7-31. Kyu Furukawa Garden.** ☞ Kami-Nakasato.

Mr. Brainwash, Kate Moss (New York Gallery)



## MAY 14 TOKYO INTERNATIONAL ART FAIR 2016

After holding a series of successful exhibitions in Oxford, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Barcelona, the Global Art Agency comes to Japan to host this year's Tokyo International Art Fair. The fair's second installment will showcase works by over 150 artists from over 40 countries. Among the artists who will present their works are French-born, L.A.-based artist Thierry; street artist "Mr. Brainwash" Guetta; and Australian artist Shane Bowden, who has earned the honorable title of "Andy Warhol on steroids." After garnering over 6,000 art lovers and collectors from around the world in 2015, the event will display thousands of incredible artworks from international and local artists under one roof, offering something for every visitor. **May 14, 11am-7pm. Omotesando Hills "Space O."** ¥1,500. ☞ Omotesando. [www.tokyoartfair.com](http://www.tokyoartfair.com)



## MAY 20 DBS PRESENTS PINCH B2B MUMDANCE

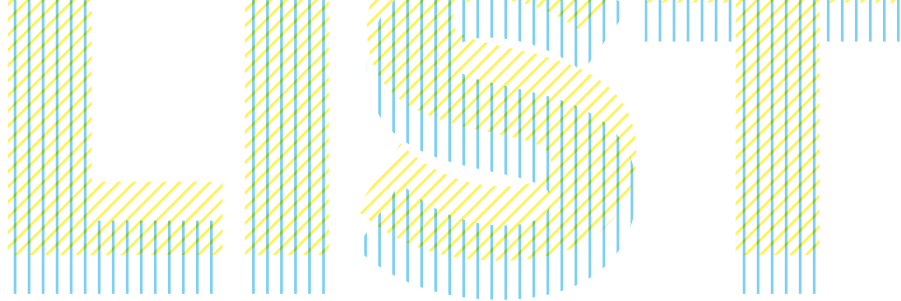
Founded in the early '00s, Drum and Bass Sessions has navigated the shifting sands of dance music trends to encompass not only recent drum 'n' bass but dubstep and future dub. The upcoming installment features back-to-back sets from English producers Pinch and Mumdance, the former a key figure in the early U.K. dubstep scene, long before the days of American "brostep." Pinch's mid-'00s *Subleased Nights* brought the emerging sounds to his hometown Bristol, where his dark sonic visions championed the likes of Flying Lotus. Growing up immersed in Britain's sound system culture, Mumdance made his mark with 2010's *The Mum Decent* EP. He hosts a regular show on London's Rinse FM, and is one of the bass music scene's young guns. **May 20. Daikanyama Unit.** ¥3,500. ☞ Daikanyama. [DanGrunebaum.com](http://DanGrunebaum.com)



## MAY 25-26 HIATUS KAIYOTE

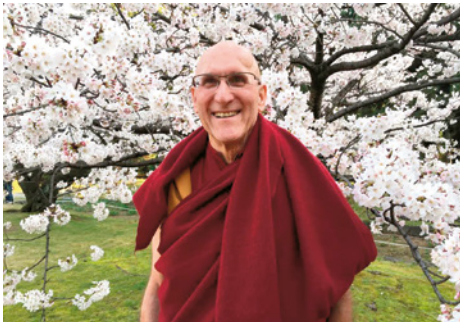
As well as being the world's most livable city, Melbourne is becoming the creative center of Australia. The city owes much of its vibrance to the retinue of talented resident artists—musicians and otherwise. Among these talents are Hiatus Kaiyote, an eclectic collective of musicians whose ingenuity knows no bound. The quartet's brand of "future-soul" music have garnered accolades from top artists including Questlove, Erykah Badu, and Prince. Their brand of "polyrhythmic, multidimensional gangster" music blends the swing of jazz, the backbeat of hip-hop/R'n'B, ethereal electronic melody, and Nai Palm's soulful vocals. The four-piece will be playing their very first show in Tokyo, where they will be emblazoning the stage with their trademark, spellbinding soul sound. The live rendition of "Breathing Underwater" is a musical experience that could not be had elsewhere. **May 25-26, 6:30pm. Blue Note Tokyo.** ¥8,500. ☞ Omotesando. <http://hiatuskaiyote.com>





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## MAY 8 GLOBAL LEADERSHIPS FOR EDUCATORS AND TEACHERS

"Physician," "philosopher," and "Buddhist monk" are titles one would not normally associate together, but Dr. Barry Kerzin is all of these, and so much more. Since his ordination as a monk by the Dalai Lama in the mid-2000s, Dr. Kerzin has completed many short and long meditation retreats and travelled around the world, teaching and offering workshops on love, compassion, and altruism. The Global Leaderships for Educators and Teachers workshop will explore happiness in successful leadership, and strives to cultivate resilience and compassion toward oneself and others. As well as lectures and discussions on global leadership, the workshop will also hold Q&A sessions as well as a meditation program. People from all professions and all walks of life are welcome. **May 8. Unilever Japan. ¥3,000. 〓 Nakameguro. <http://tinyurl.com/barrykerzinjp>**



Peter Stanick, Coyote

## MAY 9-21 GALLERIA GRAFICA TOKIO PRESENTS: "PETER STANICK"

The post-war economic boom in the 1960s brought a sense of dazzling optimism to the United States, and the pop art movement was symbolic of that era. Today, pioneering artist Peter Stanick observes the nature of society and gives pop art a digital makeover. Just like Warhol and Lichtenstein before him, the Louisiana artist has been praised by the art community for his acute awareness of the relation between image, history, and context. By heavily employing bold color and familiar stills from iconic American cartoons and films, Stanick offers his slick observation of the often self-indulgent, highly sexualized nature of today's society. After holding exhibitions around America and Europe, and in Osaka, the digital pop art pioneer will be coming back to Japan for his first-ever solo exhibition in Tokyo. **May 9-21, 11am-7pm. Galleria Grafica Tokio. 〓 Higashi-Ginza. [www.stanick.com](http://www.stanick.com)**



## MAY 12 MYSTERY JETS

Indie rock legends Mystery Jets will be returning to Japan to promote their fifth and latest LP *Curve of the Earth*. Since their humble beginnings rehearsing at a self-made boat shed in Eel Pie Island—yes, that's actually the name of the place—the U.K. rock band never shied away from creating music in the unlikelyst of places. For their latest album, the seven-piece return to their roots of performing and recording in unusual surroundings. Their latest LP was recorded in a disused button factory, and is also the product of band leader Blaine Harrison locking himself away in a log cabin. The end product is perhaps the band's most personal and ambitious recording to date. Mystery Jets will be showcasing their brand new tracks in Tokyo, so save the date! **May 12, 7:30pm. Liquid Room. ¥6,000. 〓 Ebisu. [www.mysteryjets.com](http://www.mysteryjets.com)**



## MAY 26 M83

Five years after taking the world by storm with their breakthrough single "Midnight City," French electro pop unit M83 will be coming back to Tokyo to showcase songs from their new album, *Junk*. The band's musical mastermind Anthony Gonzalez stated that this, their seventh LP, is an ode to the monotony of today's television, citing 1970s and 1980s TV as being his main influence for these songs. The album is also the first release without longtime vocalist and keyboardist Morgan Kibby, resulting in the album's departure from their usual sound. With a brand new lineup and interesting musical cameos—guitarist Steve Vai makes an uncredited appearance on the track "Go!"—their live tour is guaranteed to make for an interesting live experience for fans old and new. **May 26, 7pm. Shinkiba Coast. ¥6,500. 〓 Shinkiba. <http://ilovem83.com/>**



Dan Perjovschi, dialog, 1995 [Reference Image]

## UNTIL MAY 29 LOOSE LIPS SAVE SHIPS

Amid talk of news anchors forced to quit and secrecy laws, the MOT's latest annual exhibition takes up the issue of freedom of speech and Japan's tendency toward self-censorship. The show grows out of a two-day talk session co-organized by MOT and Artists' Guild last year, which focused on life, living, and livelihood in Japan. The artist collective Artists' Guild and MOT's Kazuhiko Yoshizaki co-curate a show considering artists' ability to speak out amid what they call a growing intolerance. Works include video installations from artists like Meiro Koizumi and Hikaru Fujii, a "performative intervention" by Satoshi Hashimoto, and a publication created in tandem with Koki Tanaka. Recognizing the significance of speaking out without fear, the show asks questions concerning the conditions of artistic expression and society today. **Until May 29. Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. ¥1,000. 〓 Kiyosumi-Shirakawa. <http://tinyurl.com/motannual2016>** *Dan Grunebaum*



## MAY 30 **EDITOR'S PICK** MOGWAI

For people who were born after the Second World War, Hiroshima is a dystopian scenario that requires more than just careful imagination. While many of us have seen the iconic image of the mushroom cloud filling the sky, to fathom the humanity behind the tragedy is another story altogether. Scottish post-punk outfit Mogwai chronologically retells the story of nuclear disaster and innovation with their latest release *Atomic*, and the result is spellbinding. Originally a soundtrack for Mark Cousins' archival film documentary *Atomic: Living In Dread and Promise*, *Atomic* features a clear, identifiable arc on the innovation and disasters of nuclear power. Understandably, the retrospective soundtrack has been hailed by critics as "one of their most reverent works in a decade," and the soundscape provides a powerful narrative on the past, present, and future of nuclear energy. **May 30, 7:30pm. Roppongi Ex-Theater. ¥6,800-7,300. 〓 Roppongi. [www.mogwai.co.uk](http://www.mogwai.co.uk)** *Dan Grunebaum*





# HEART OF GLASS

## Leonardo DiCaprio channels his inner survivor

BY AKIRA DAVIS; INTERVIEW BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Photos © 2016 Twentieth Century Fox

Perhaps one of the most beautifully unsettling films to have come out in recent years, *The Revenant* is a visceral and immersive cinematic experience. It's only fitting that this thriller was the film that put that coveted golden statuette into the hands of its leading man, Leonardo DiCaprio.

The story follows the survival of frontiersman Hugh Glass (DiCaprio), who, while exploring the uncharted American wilderness, is left for dead after being mauled by a bear. When his son is murdered by a member of his hunting team (Tom Hardy), Glass must rely on his survival skills and instinct to find his way back to civilization. Fueled by vengeance and guided by sheer will, the fur trapper treks through snowy terrains for miles to track down the man who betrayed him.

Inspired by a true story, the film was directed and co-written by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, and is perhaps one of his most ambitious works to date.

Fresh off his Oscar win, DiCaprio recounts the historical background, the aspiration and the physical challenges of the film.



### What drew you to the project and the role?

What drew me to this project was the opportunity of working with Alejandro. He's a man with a clear vision, and there aren't many filmmakers out there who can turn an epic, existential poetry into a movie like this. The film is about an American campfire legend, and the story is pretty linear.

Glass is a fur trapper and a survivalist who struggles for his life, crawling through hundreds of miles of wilderness on his own after being mauled by a bear.

In the hands of Alejandro, the story becomes so much more than that. The film highlights the power of the human spirit, and the story becomes much deeper than a standard revenge story.

### Was it your aim to make this film "poetic"?

Definitely. We tried to make this film as visually poetic as possible. In doing so, we had to hide and immerse ourselves in nature, while planning what will happen next. To bring the movie to life, we spent months carefully preparing some shots, and read through as many documents as possible for research—cultural

backgrounds. But ultimately, nature took over.

We tried our best to turn this film into a kind of virtual reality, like a documentary, so that people who watch this film can be in a completely different world, during difficult times in history.

The bear sequence has been getting a lot of good reviews from the critics. I feel that scene will give audiences a great movie experience. We went to great lengths to shoot that scene, but the end result is unlike anything else. During the attack, you can almost feel the bear's breath. You feel this new awakening of a new sensation, and you feel breathless. What Alejandro achieved with this transcends anything I've seen in any movie.

### The movie feels so real, it's as if you're actually there. Was this one of the aims of the film?

No doubt about it. To make the experience as authentic as possible, Alejandro and Chivo [Emmanuel Lubezki, cinematographer] had this vision to shoot in natural light. We rehearsed all day, every day, and we had a two-hour window to shoot in natural light. Movies like *Barry Lindon* used natural light and candlelight, but we went one step further; no artificial light was used at all!

At one stage during the process, I think Chivo and Alejandro developed this sense of unity with nature. [One of them] would have the camera swerve off to this expansive battle sequence, then come right back to another intimate moment with the character, and then move.

It's hard to compare this film to other movies. This is an extremely ambitious film that's rare in Hollywood. This is a linear story about a man's survival and revenge, but at the same time, grows into this amazing visual poetry.

### Was it a challenge for you as an actor to express your thoughts and emotions without words?

It was difficult but worthwhile. Glass only had one motivation—revenge and survival—and many of his lines were ones in which he express his emotions. Alejandro and I discussed these aspects of the film thoroughly. We carefully analyzed the script, looked for special moments, and then I would immerse myself in Glass' character and his experience.

Glass doesn't say much throughout the film. But so long as the actor can channel the character's feeling, you can project much of the character without dialogue. What made this role particularly unique is that these emotions were seldom verbalized, and it required me to take a completely different approach.

**This interview took place in New York, on October 14. *The Revenant* is in theaters now.**



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Jared Bush (left), Clark Spencer

# PARALLEL ZOOVERSE

## I Left My Heart in Zootopia

BY AKIRA DAVIS

Since the days of Aesop's fables, talking animals have been the storyteller's best friend. Disney's *Zootopia* is the latest addition to its roster of comedies featuring anthropomorphized critters in leading roles. But it's more than that: *Zootopia* is also an intelligent statement on how bias and prejudice have become so intrinsic in our world, and explores these themes with humor and charm.

Clark Spencer and Jared Bush, the film's producer and co-director of the film talks to *Metropolis* about the creation of Disney's mammalian masterpiece.

### How did the idea of the city come to be?

**Jared Bush:** Originally, Byron Howard—one of the directors—wanted to do a movie about talking animals, since Disney hasn't done one in a really long time. He pitched the idea to John [Lasseter] and loved the idea, but said, "We need to find a way to do talking animals like no-one has done before."

I joined the project about four and half years ago, and [*Zootopia*] was originally going to be a spy movie. The first two minutes was going to be set in this city, with an animal, and then it'd move to a tropical island. Then everybody was like, "Wait a second, the city is the neatest part about this!"

### Did the the concept of the city evolve with time?

**JB:** We started off with a year of extensive research. We tried to figure out how this city would be designed, what types of animals would be there, and how they will coexist with each other. During the research, we learned that in the natural world, there are 90 percent prey animals, to 10 percent predators. We thought that was a juicy

statistic, so we started building the world around that concept—what the rules of the world would be—and it became very interesting to make the connection between the animal world and the human world as we know it now, and how we live, and what kind of preconceptions we have on one another.

**Clark Spencer:** One of the important things that John Lasseter kept reminding us is, "Remember, these are not humans in animal suits." The animation team really had to study each of these 64 different species, learning about behaviors that are unique to each of them, how a rabbit twitches their nose, how elephants use their trunks as an arm, etc. Each one of those things had to be incorporated in a way that feels natural, so that we're not confused as humans watching them, but [it] still has the natural animal quality to them.

### The chemistry between Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde really drives the momentum of this film.

#### How did this dynamic duo come about?

**JB:** We wanted the audience to fall in love with the relationship dynamics [between the two characters]. It's not a romantic relationship; this is between two friends. So we looked at a lot of friend dynamics; we had a look at Mulder and Scully from the X-Files, and [Sherlock] Holmes and Watson at early stages. It's a buddy-cop-y movie, so the characters [have] got to have this sense of mutual respect, and are able to make fun of each other.

For me, it was really important finding an interesting character dynamic where they can both evolve and both learn. What was really important is finding a way where Judy's optimism allows her to ultimately succeed and win Nick over, and how Nick's cynicism allows her to get a glimpse into complex, real-world problems, and how often this comes from within us. Had Nick not come into her life, she never would have figured that out.

### How did this translate with the casting?

**CS:** We tend to want to cast people that are like the character in real life ... and we oftentimes say to the actor, "Just be who you are." We thought someone who plays Judy needs to be pure of heart and is completely optimistic, and Ginnifer Goodwin really embodied that side of it. Jason Bateman's character, Nick, on the other hand, is cynical and will say things that aren't always the nicest thing in the world. Jason Bateman has the ability to say anything, and you still like him! We kept that criteria when getting people to do their voices—around the world, not just for the U.S. version.

### What were some of the challenges of directing and producing the film?

**CS:** For me, it was the scope and size of this endeavor that was the most difficult and complex part. We wanted "scale" to be the big important part of the film. For example ... a mouse is 95th the size of a giraffe. So how the layout artist and cinematographer do a scene with a mouse and a giraffe becomes really complicated. You also have to have think for the city to have doors, cars, and streets for different-sized animals, which became a fun but really complex process. As a producer, you start to think, "Well, can we actually do this?" We need to create technology that's never been created before to make the furs realistic, we need to be able to create these environments, to animate this entire film. All of these things became challenges, but we all stayed together and figured it all out in the end.

**JB:** Over the course of making the movie, you try many different versions of the story. Writing-wise, I have literally 1,700 drafts of the film saved onto my computer! You try to find the best ways to tell interesting stories that will hopefully resonate around the world, and that could be very challenging. We decided that we wanted to do a story about bias, as it's been such a consistent problem around the world. The biggest challenge was how we do that in a way that doesn't sound preachy: how do we create a film that's entertaining for adults, kids and everybody but at the same time touches on the issue that's very difficult to talk about? I think, to me, trying to work out that balance was the most difficult part of directing this film.

**Read our full interview with Jared Bush and Clark Spencer at [www.metropolisjapan.com](http://www.metropolisjapan.com).**





frozen in time, marionettes dangling from the ceiling, rows of skeleton keys, and retired cookware. Accompanied by one of the café's signature drinks, it's enchanting to sit back in one of the dark wooden chairs and temporarily step back in time.

COFFEE ¥¥ EN/JP

# CAFÉ MIEL

Folksy antiques with a side of scones

BY TAMATHA ROMAN

**C**afé Miel discreetly sits on a side street close to Kudanshita Station, skirting alongside the moat surrounding Tokyo's Imperial Palace. While within walking distance of a few big-ticket attractions, including Yasukuni Shrine and the Nippon Budokan indoor arena, the café remains largely ignored by foreigners, thanks in large part to its deceptive facade.

Piles of rocking horses, old wooden ladders, tea kettles, and watering pails of

all shapes and sizes lay haphazardly outside the entrance, with the word "Miel" in stylized white letters displayed simply above the chaos. The café resembles an antique shop and is easy to overlook, unless you happen to be in the market for some rustic relics. Yet this cleverly disguised hideaway offers a warm respite from nearby sightseeing spots, with delicious coffee to boot.

Dimly lit, surprisingly spacious, and oozing with ambiance, Café Miel is indeed overflowing with antiques. Shinichiro Nakazawa, the café's owner, opened the establishment in 2003 in order to display his unique collection of antiques, which he had accumulated over the years.

What started out as a hobby turned into the café showroom it is today, Nakazawa explained. His keepsakes can be admired throughout the café: large clocks



The menu offers an impressive selection of coffee and tea concoctions, carefully prepared behind the bar and served in ceramic cups. The cinnamon milk tea (¥750) and Vienna coffee (¥700) are highly recommended, both delectably aromatic and piping hot. To accompany your

drink, try an order of sugary scones (¥550), served, as they're intended to be, with clotted cream and jam. If you're so inclined, take advantage of their extensive bar and order a tall Irish coffee (¥800).

The café is, however, best known for its drinks and desserts, simple pasta, soups, and sandwich dishes, including an inexpensive yet popular lunch set of beef stew and fresh rolls (¥1,380).

No English menu is on hand, but a few staff members speak limited English and can help you with your order. Lunch hours and weekends can get quite busy, so be prepared for a bit of a wait. Every few months, Café Miel holds predominantly jazz and tango live music events, which are regularly promoted on their Facebook page.

**Café Miel. 2-2-8 Kudanminami, Chiyoda-ku. Open Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm; Sat, 11:30am-6pm (closed Sun). Tel: 03-3262-8878. ☎ Kudanshita. [www.cafe-miel.jp](http://www.cafe-miel.jp).**







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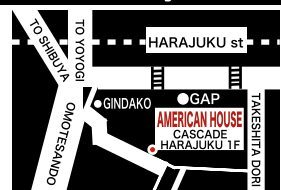
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## NATURE AND NURTURE

### Tips for seasonal eating in Japan

BY JESSICA THOMPSON

Ask a Japanese person what they eat in summer, and watch as their mind drifts off to memories of eating grilled ayu fish and shaved ice while watching fireworks. Ask them about autumn, and you'll hear stories about the *kurigohan* (chestnut rice) and *hoshigaki* (dried persimmon) eaten after some *koyo* (autumn leaf-viewing). Spring recalls picnics under flowering cherry blossom trees, with a picnic rug lined with *ichigo daifuku* (sweet rice cake filled with red bean paste and a strawberry) and cups of sake laced with *sakura* petals. Winter, steaming bowls of *nabe* (hot pot) eaten at home with one's legs under a *kotatsu*, or the tantalising scent of caramelizing sweet potatoes wafting down the street from a *yaki imo* (grilled sweet potato) van.

But beyond capitalizing on produce when it's at its flavor peak, the tastes of the seasons are aligned with foods that provide specific health needs for that time of year, as documented by Sagen Ishizuka, the Meiji-era doctor to the Imperial Japanese Army and pioneer of the concept of *shokuiku* (healthy eating) and the macrobiotic diet. *Shiki no shi aji*, he noted, is the "taste of the four seasons."

#### Summer is vinegared

Japanese summers are hot and sweaty affairs, with average temperatures reaching 30 degrees Celsius and humidity hanging thick in the air. *Natsubate* (summer fatigue) strikes many, and bodies need replenishing and cooling. Beyond reaching for an ice-cold Asahi, vinegared and sour foods help to beat the heat. Vinegar can stimulate circulation to cool the body down, and provides a sense of refreshment on the system by stimulating saliva glands. Vinegar also has

a preserving effect and antibacterial qualities, which is a convenient bonus during a season when food can easily go rancid.

**Try:** *Wakame* and cucumber *sunomono* (Japanese vinegar salad), *hiyashi chūka* (cold ramen and vegetables, flavored with vinegar), and *aji no nanbanzuke* (deep-fried, vinegar-marinated baby horse mackerel).

#### Autumn is pungent and spicy

Autumn is about building up energy reserves for the winter, and compensating for physical strength worn off in the summer. The stockpiling of spicy foods, which are natural appetite enhancers, is encouraged. The ingredients in season during autumn are strong on the pungency front—green peppers, new buckwheat, sanma fish, mushrooms—and can be enhanced by piquant boosters like ginger, garlic, and onions.

**Try:** *Matsutake gohan* (matsutake mushroom rice), green pepper *yakitori*, sanma grilled served with daikon, or sanma *nigiri* (fish pressed over vinegared rice) with ginger.

#### Winter is oily and fatty

When winter's chill takes hold in Japan, bodies need physical strength to overcome the cold, and extra calories to restore the energy burnt keeping warm. This means eating foods higher in natural fats, and cooked with oil. *Buri* (amberjack), high in omega-3 fatty acids, is in its prime in the winter months, and hearty *nabemono* (hot-pot dishes) that feature fried or fattier ingredients are popular.

**Try:** *Buri daikon* (amberjack stewed with daikon), *oden* (stewed hot pot), *agedashi dōfu* (deep-fried tofu in dashi), *chanko nabe* (a sumo favorite!), and *sukiyaki*.

#### Spring is bitter

The bitter taste of spring comes in the form of *sansai*, spring's wild mountain vegetables. These enchantingly gnarly-looking mountain veggies start to sprout across Japan from late February to early March, and are characteristically bitter. Their astringent properties help break down the fat storage and flush the toxins of idleness and heavier foods of winter. Many *sansai* are also rich in vitamin C, which helps digestion.

**Try:** *Taranome* (angelica) and *fukinoto* (butterbur bud) tempura, *takenoko mazegohan* (bamboo shoots in rice), and *nanohana ohitashi* (nanohana dressed with soy dressing seasoning).

### RECIPE

## TAKENOKO MAZEGOHAN

BY JESSICA THOMPSON



### INGREDIENTS

- 50g *inari*-tofu, cut into strips
- 1¾ cup (385 ml) *dashi*
- 2 tbsp mirin
- 2 tbsp sake
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce
- ½ tsp salt
- 1¾ cup (350g) rice
- 200g boiled *takenoko*, chopped
- Chopped *mizuna*, *shungiku*, or other greens, to serve

SERVINGS  
4

### PREPARATION

1. Add tofu strips to a small frying pan over a medium-high heat, and fry for 1 to 2 min or until just browned.
2. Add dashi, mirin, sake, soy sauce, and salt into a saucepan. Stir to combine and dissolve salt.
3. Add rice, then sprinkle over takenoko and fried tofu. Cover with a lid and place on the stove over a high heat. Bring just to boil, then turn heat to low. Cook for 15 min, then turn off heat and allow to sit for 10 min. It's important to keep the lid on for the entire cooking process to keep the steam from escaping.
4. Remove the lid and use a fork to gently fluff the rice and mix through the *takenoko* and tofu. This can be done in the saucepan or after transferring to a larger bowl.
5. To serve, spoon rice into separate bowls and sprinkle over some chopped *mizuna*.



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## ADVERTORIAL



## WORLD'S TOP PLAYERS HIT UP TOKYO DARTS MASTERS

The world's leading darts players are coming back to Japan. International champs will take on Japan's best darts stars in the Professional Darts Corporation's (PDC) World Series of Darts event.

The World Series first visited Japan in 2015, when legendary 16-time world champion Phil "The Power" Taylor from the U.K. took victory in a hugely successful championship, in front of over 1,000 fans.

This year, the 16-player tournament moves to Yoyogi National Gymnasium 2. The first round on July 6 sees Japan's top eight compete against eight of the world's top-ranked players. The winners will then return to the stage on July 7 for the quarter-finals, semi-finals, and final match.

The eight PDC players competing in Japan will be headed by Michael "Mighty Mike" van Gerwen from the Netherlands, who won the 2014 World Championship and has claimed all of PDC's major ranking titles over the past four years. Taylor will also return to defend his title and add to his unparalleled list of victories over his 25-year career.



Current world champion Gary "The Flying Scotsman" Anderson, who has won both the World Championship and Premier League twice, also returns to Japan alongside other former World Champs, The Netherlands' Raymond "Barney" van Barneveld and England's Adrian "Jackpot" Lewis. Also competing this year are England's James "The Machine" Wade and Dave "Chizzy" Chisnall.



Japan also made its mark on the global stage, when four-time World Championship qualifier Haruki "HAL" Muramatsu became the first Japanese player to win a PDC Tour Card, be classified as a full-time professional, and to have tested himself against top players across the globe since.



### BRING ON THE DARTS!

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[www.s-darts.com](http://www.s-darts.com), and [www.dartshive.jp](http://www.dartshive.jp).





# ESCAPE HUNT

## A fun way to leave a room

BY TAMATHA ROMAN

In life, there are few occasions when being handcuffed is a desired choice. Kinky thoughts aside, the only other acceptable answer is a live escape game, where constraints are often a means to an end. Finagle your way through puzzles and obstacles as you try not to crack under pressure. Sure, you may think that you're a wiz at standard video game fare. But can you survive the real thing?

Originally a popular video game genre, escape games shifted from the couch to the live arena around 2008, and are currently considered the fastest-growing in the themed entertainment industry. There are about 3,000 rooms worldwide, with some European cities having up to 30 venues. Most web historians agree that the first live action escape game was pioneered in Japan. However, despite these roots and an obsession for the video game scene, live escape games remain rare in Japan and have yet to see a surge in popularity.

The premise of live escape games is simple, yet the actual game is not. You and your cohort of pseudo-prisoners are stuck in a room with the goal of, more often than

not, escaping it before time runs out. Using deductive reasoning, magical brain power, and math skills drummed up from high school, you must discover clues and solve a series of puzzles in order to obtain your freedom. Everything in the room becomes potential fodder as clues are not evident, even if they are in plain sight. Most players end up tearing up the space like deranged bulls. Puzzles tend to get more challenging and frustrating with each success, and can involve codes, numbers and letters, keys and locks, and maps. A moderator, channeling Big Brother, watches from outside the room and keeps track of time. Depending on the venue, they may or may not provide help.

My own escape game resume includes ventures in Malaysia, Slovakia, and Slovenia—yet I have only successfully escaped once. On a level considered easy, my teammates and I had crawled, screaming, through a tunnel, as a terrifyingly loud alarm blared to indicate that we were seconds away from losing, and thus “exploding.” Hardly anything to brag about. In the other games, the near misses were



frustrating but only fueled an inner fire: the belief that I could do better.

Luckily, I found the chance to redeem myself at Escape Hunt, the only permanent escape game venue offered entirely in English in the Tokyo area. A popular franchise with branches all over the world, Escape Hunt opened locally in August 2015 and offers two rooms based around the themes “Runaway Bride,” “Samurai Espionage,” and “Zen.” (All include their own Japanese-themed subplots.) Games have a time limit of 60 minutes. Two to five people are permitted per room, but you're welcome to bring a crowd and compete against each other in the “twinned” rooms.

We decided to take on the “Samurai” room, with its promise of puzzles within puzzles and the goal of protecting a shogun from assassination. Dressed for success—detective costumes—we were ceremoniously locked in and left to our own devices. Though I cannot reveal anything about the actual room, we found it challenging but not impossible. Compared to other escape games out there, our moderator was not intrusive. Instead, players at Escape Hunt can request hints by pushing a buzzer, upon which the moderator comes in and clues them in. But with each hint, you lose a minute. Needless to say, we failed, even after buzzing twice. The shogun was thus assassinated and, in shame, we all committed mental *seppuku* (belly-cutting). However, the staff at Escape Hunt brought us back to life with tea and snacks, post-failure. We also took home a free photo, sporting our game attire and sad expressions.

Pity party aside, the hospitable service at Escape Hunt Tokyo is enough to lure us back, especially with the promise of new themes in the near future. As the games are tailored for a truly Japanese experience, tourists and residents alike will enjoy being immersed in the story lines. Escape Hunt Tokyo is a unique way to bond with your friends and, quite literally, a great escape from the chaos of the city.

**Escape Hunt. KN Asakusa Bldg. 6F, 1-10-5 Asakusa, Taito-ku. Open daily, 11am-10pm. Tel: 03-6231-6621. Asakusa. [www.tokyo.escapehunt.com](http://www.tokyo.escapehunt.com).**



# EXPERIENCE DEEP KOYASAN

Finding soul space beyond the tourist track

BY ALENA ECKELMANN

**M**y car slowly climbs across the seemingly countless slopes of the scenic Koya skyline. With every curve, anticipation grows to reach Koyasan, one of Japan's most sacred places.

Located high up in a forested mountain valley and surrounded by eight peaks, this 1,200-year-old Buddhist mountain monastery attracts countless visitors year-round. Rather than just sightseeing, my intention this time is to find some quiet time to relax, practice mindfulness, and search for spiritual wisdom.

## MANY WAYS LEAD TO KOYASAN

The Koya skyline connects Kumano, another sacred area located in the south of the Kii Peninsula, with Koyasan in the north. In spring, the bright pink of the *yama sakura* (mountain cherry trees) and in autumn the flaming red and orange of *momiji* (maple leaves) capture one's attention. This is a driver's paradise. There are hardly any traffic lights for 70 kilometers, and every meandering turn reveals a gorgeous vista. There's no better way for explorers-at-heart than to rent a car and drive.

Kumano and Koyasan are also connected by a pilgrims' trail, the Kumano Kodo's Kohechi course, which crosses the steep mountains of the peninsula. Walking this trail might take four days, but by car one can reach Koyasan in just three hours from either



Daimon Gate, the Ancient Entrance to Koyasan in Wakayama

Shirahama or Kii-Tanabe in the south.

The Kumano Kodo trails, which comprise the "Three Kumano Grand Shrines" located respectively in Hongu, Shingu and Nachi, and Koyasan, were inscribed as part of a UNESCO Heritage Site in 2004. But the history of these sacred Shinto and Buddhist sites in Wakayama Prefecture reaches back well over a thousand years.

The Buddhist monk Kobo Daishi is one of Japan's most prominent saints and the founder of Japan's Shingon branch of Esoteric Buddhism. Kobo Daishi opened up Koyasan in the 8th century as a place for monks to train, set in the remote mountains far away from worldly affairs. While Koyasan is less of a secret these days, escaping the hustle of city life is still its big draw.

The next stop on my trek through the world of Kobo Daishi—known as the "great teacher"—is to explore the various activities that monks engage in and trace the footprints of pilgrims to Koyasan's sacred sites, Okunoin and Danjo Garan.



## LODGING AND EATING LIKE A MONK

This time, I stay at Muryokoin Temple. There are 117 temples in Koyasan, and 52 of them accept guests for overnight stays. These *shukubo*, or temple lodgings, were originally meant for pilgrims but now also accept other visitors.

A monk greets me at the entrance, checks me in, and guides me to my room while explaining facilities and temple etiquette. He brings me a cup of tea and sweets just like you would





receive at a traditional Japanese inn. Sitting on the tatami floor and sticking my legs under the *kotatsu* (heated blanket table) to keep warm, I slowly wind down and settle into Koya's world.

My room is typically Japanese, with sliding doors, richly decorated with images of nature; white paper-screen windows; and an austere alcove that holds a vase and paper scroll. Dinner is served in the room while breakfast is taken in a larger hall together with other guests.

On the table I find wooden sticks, *goma ki*. These are prayer sticks that are put into the fire during the *goma* (traditional fire ceremony) in the morning. I learn that the sacred fire burns all hindrances to enlightenment. Anything that speeds up the process sounds good to me. I write my name, age, and wish on a couple of sticks and hand them over to the monks at the reception desk.

Around 6pm, a young monk politely announces himself outside the sliding door before entering. He brings in my dinner on two trays, which he sets out on the tatami floor. An arrangement of small bowls and dishes contains

Koyasan's famous *shojin ryori*, a vegan cuisine eaten by monks, consisting of tofu, beans, vegetables, and fruit. Famous are *koya* and *goma* tofu, the former being freeze-dried and the latter flavored with sesame. I learned that content and presentation are based on "five cooking methods, five flavors, and five colors." Rice and a clear soup fill the remaining space in my stomach, and the meal is concluded with a cup of tea.

## IN SEARCH OF "A"

I am sitting cross-legged in lotus position on a *zabuton* cushion folded in a triangle to support a straight posture. I sense the observational presence of a monk behind me as he provides instructions—"relax your body and follow your breath." This practice is known as "*ajikan*," a meditation used by Koyasan monks.

"A" is the first letter in the Sanskrit alphabet. It stands for beginning and birth. In Shingon Buddhism, "A" also refers to *dainichi nyorai*, the cosmic Buddha and the highest-ranking deity in the pantheon of Esoteric Buddhism in

Japan. The ultimate aim of *ajikan* is to become one with this Buddha. Shingon teaches that Buddhist nature is in every one of us and we can awaken it and reach enlightenment in this very lifetime.

This sounds promising, although easier said than done. Sitting on my cushion, I concentrate on breathing in and out. On exhaling, I voice the letter "A" from deep in my belly into the space in front of me. It's hard not to think about work piling up, family waiting for a visit, or the next holiday destination.

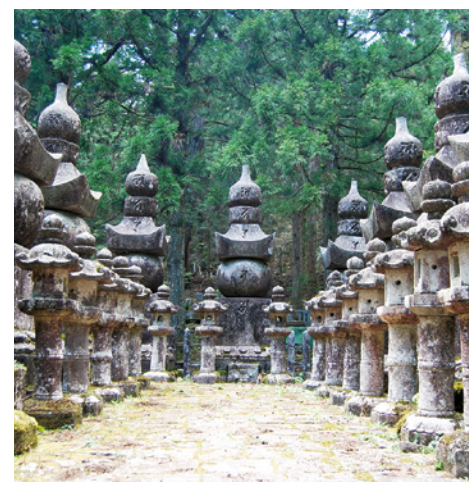
My one-hour meditation practice gives only a short glimpse into the world of the hard training that Koya's monks go through. Typically, they pass a three-year program before graduating as fully-fledged monks. During this time, they serve as *terasei* (temple students). Their duties—not purely of a holy nature—include cleaning and serving guests like me, which is considered part of their induction.

## SACRED MEETS SPOOKY

It's not bedtime yet, as I have signed up for a **night walk** through Japan's largest graveyard, the **Okunoin**. The walk will take us to the Kobo Daishi Gobyō, the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. According to Koyasan legend, O-Daishi-sama, as believers affectionately refer to him, did not actually pass away, and has been sitting in Okunoin in eternal meditation for over 1,200 years. You can see the monks bringing him food twice a day, at 6am and 10:30am.

Three bridges across small rivers mark the gateways from our mundane world into the sacred world of the saint. Our guide is a young monk from Ekoin Temple who instructs us in excellent English to bow at each bridge so as to greet Kobo Daishi.

Stone lanterns line the two-kilometer stone path to the mausoleum. They shed just enough light to make out countless *gorinto* (five-tiered stupas), which serve as gravestones. They consist of five different shapes and each tier is inscribed with five Sanskrit letters that represent the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and space.







There are said to be over 200,000 graves, some centuries old and holding the remains of famous warlords, with other more recent ones possibly belonging to 20th-century Japanese businessmen. Regardless of religion, nationality, and status, anyone who believes in Kobo Daishi's power can find a resting place here.

Before passing the third bridge—the last into the most inner sanctum—we walk by a row of Buddhist statues. The monk asks us to splash some water on them and pray for our ancestors. In front of the saint's mausoleum stands the **Torodo**, or “Lantern Hall.” Here, over 10,000 lanterns donated by believers burn day and night. Walking to the **Kobo Daishi Gobyo** in the back, we stand with hands folded in Gassho Buddhist prayer style. While the monk chants a prayer, we make a wish to Kobo Daishi.

No graveyard night walk is complete without some spooky folklore to go with it. A caution to those who visit: never drip water on the stone steps across the bridges. And make sure you're able to see your reflection deep down in the well on the side of the path, or else your life might run short! If you dare test your strength by attempting to lift a karma stone, beware that failing to move it means you have accumulated too many sins in this life.

Back in the temple, a nice hot bath is a perfect way to end the day. The monks have laid out the futon. Shukubo rooms usually don't have TVs, and it's recommended that you leave your laptops and mobile phones switched off. Free of all modern distraction, I drift off to sleep, surrounded by nothing but pure serenity.

## CHANT AND FIRE

The next day starts early. I wake up at 6am and get ready to attend **otsutome**, the morning ceremony where the monks chant Buddhist sutras. One of the monks greets guests at the entrance of the main temple hall. He places incense in the palms of our hands to purify us.

Candles are burning and incense wafting throughout the hall. More monks come in and find their seat near the main altar. A bell rings, and the monks start chanting the *Hannya-rishu-kyo*, the “Principle of Wisdom” sutra. Their deep voices seem to resonate in the air. I was sleepy before, but suddenly all of my senses are fully present.

On the other side of the room, one monk sits on a raised table with a caldron in the middle, in which he kindles a fire. This is the **goma** fire ceremony that's typically dedicated to Fudō Myōō, the “immovable wisdom” king. A statue of Myōō peers down on us from behind the altar, looking none too pleased. A raised sword in his right hand and a rope in his left, he looks ready to fight for each soul.

Later, a monk explains that in Buddhist teaching, human passions cause suffering, which keeps us from leading a happy and fulfilling life. However, this suffering can be ended if we make an effort to follow the path of proper conduct in mind, speech, and action. As a temporary measure to ensure happy days, we can enlist help from a higher realm.

The goma ki prayer sticks take our worldly wishes up to heaven with the smoke and rising flames. Good health, success in various

endeavors like work and study, good family relations, or finding a love match ... the Buddhist deities understand that we humans need a little help.

After the end of the prayer service, I feel spiritually cleansed, even though my stomach is rumbling with hunger. I'm thankful when I spot a group of monks rushing from the temple to the kitchen at around 8am, promptly calling us for breakfast.

## FOLLOW YOUR HEART

After satisfying my stomach, I am ready again for some spiritual intake. This morning I try **sha-kyo**, or sutra copying—another kind of meditation. I'm given the *hannya shingyo* (heart sutra), one of the most popular Buddhist scriptures. This sutra is said to be extremely powerful and Kobo Daishi is even said to have once used it in a healing ritual to ban an epidemic disease that had befallen Japan.

In front of me, a sheet of Japanese tracing paper lays atop a template from which I can copy. The two sheets are held in place with metal





weights, and there's a brush pen to the side. Before starting the practice, I wash my hands, rinse my mouth, and then put my hands together for a short prayer dedicated to Kobo Daishi. With concentration and focus, I slowly copy each of the 270 kanji of this sutra. This is a great exercise in mindfulness that surely helps me make a connection to my heart, although the deeper meaning of the sutra is beyond my grasp.

## EXPLORING THE SHINGON UNIVERSE

Around 10am, I am ready for a walk to the **Danjo Garan**, the ceremonial center of Koyasan. "*Garan*" literally means "a quiet place where Buddhist monks can practice." When Kobo Daishi planned the monastery, he wanted a secluded place for meditation.

An imposing 50-meter-tall vermillion-red pagoda, the **Konpon Daito** (Great Pagoda), immediately catches my eye. It houses a three-dimensional mandala of the Shingon world. At its core is a seated statue of Dainichi Nyorai, the Cosmic Buddha, the main deity in this school of Buddhism. The pagoda is flanked by the statues of four other Buddhas, and each of the surrounding 16 pillars features paintings of Bodhisattvas. On the corners of the building are paintings of the eight patriarchs of Shingon Buddhism, with the eighth depicting Kobo Daishi.

In the center of the Danjo Garan stands the



**Kondo** ("golden hall"). Here, many of Koyasan's ceremonies and rituals are held throughout the year. The **Kechien Kanjo** Buddhist initiations for laypeople are conducted here in May and October. In this ceremony, a karmic bond is established between the participant and a Buddha.

Blindfolded, each participant tosses a leaf onto a mandala that contains paintings of Buddhas, and depending on where the leaf falls, the respective Buddha will become your guide. Anyone who wishes to can attend.

There are many other temples and shrines in the Danjo Garan complex. I take time to stroll around and listen to the detailed explanations of the **Koya audio guide** before heading to the **Daishi Kyokai** where laypeople can receive the **jukai** (Buddhist precepts).

After signing up, I'm led into the dimly lit **jukai-do** ("precept hall"), where I sit down in front of a senior monk. I can barely make out his shape in the darkness. I repeat a sequence of sentences in Japanese, and step forward to receive a blessing from the monk. Within 30 minutes, I have gained my place in the Buddhist community.

Across the road is **Kongobuji Temple**, headquarters of Koya's Shingon Buddhism and the administrative center for 4,000 Shingon temples across Japan. I come here for the lavish paintings on the sliding doors, which include a series depicting Kobo Daishi's journey in China, as well as Japan's largest rock garden. **One-hundred-and-forty granite stones** are set in a bed of white sand. The stones are said to depict a pair of dragons and the sand to symbolize clouds. This is a beautiful place for a moment of quiet contemplation.

## A BREEZE OF BUDDHIST TEACHING

The monks I encounter on Koyasan earnestly describe the history of the area and Kobo Daishi's many achievements, while cheekily mixing in the occasional pearl of Buddhist wisdom. The story of the lotus that grows from murky water to become a clean white beautiful flower, for example, reminds us that we can be human beings with a pure heart, in spite of our surroundings or circumstances.

Shingon Buddhism teaches us that enlightenment can happen in this body and life, not many incarnations later. However, reaching the highest level of consciousness won't happen without dedication and determination. While saying a prayer is fine, the deities expect us to make an effort first before chipping in.



Koya-kun,  
mascot character  
of Mount Koya

ACCESS

**Japan Airlines** services three flights a day to **Nanki-Shirahama Airport** from Tokyo's Haneda Airport. [www.jal.co.jp/en](http://www.jal.co.jp/en)

Hiring a rental car is the best option for getting around Kumano and up to Koyasan. Car rental services are available at Nanki-Shirahama Airport and at Kii-Tanabe train station. Some cars are equipped with English GPS.

## Koyasan Checklist

- **Ajikan:** from Apr-Oct at Kongobuji Temple. Reservations essential.
- **Otsutome:** held every morning at 6am at Shukubo temples. Free for overnight guests to attend.
- **Goma:** conducted at certain temples only (please inquire when booking your stay); goma ki: ¥300-500.
- **Kechien Kanjo:** May 3-5 or Oct 1-3, open 8am-4pm. Book at the Daito reception desk. ¥3,000 per person each time.
- **Koyasan Audio Guide:** rental from Koya Town Tourist Information Center Central office, Ichinohashi office. ¥500 per day, until 10am the following morning; Languages: English, French, Chinese, Korean, Japanese.
- **Koya Town Tourist Information Center-Central office, Ichinohashi office, Nakanohashi office:** for information, brochures, and maps in English, French, Italian, Chinese, Korean, and Thai. 9am-5pm (closed on Sat, Sun, & hols); [www.koya.org](http://www.koya.org).
- **Jukai:** at the Daishi Kyokai on the hour from 9am-4pm, except noon. 30 minutes ritual. ¥500.
- **Night Walk:** sign up at Ekoin Temple. Starts 7:15pm every night, depending on weather and monks' availability. ¥1,500.
- **Shakyo:** at the Daishi Kyokai 8:30am-3pm, and at selected Shukubo (please inquire when booking your stay). ¥1,000 if the copied sutra is presented as offering to a deity, otherwise a paper fee of ¥100 is charged.
- **Shukubo and Shojin Ryori:** Koyasan Shukubo Association. 8:30am-5pm. [www.shukubo.net](http://www.shukubo.net).

## Opening Times/Entrance Fees

- **Danjo Garan:** freely accessible at any time, except for Kondon Daito and Kondo. Free entrance.
- **Daishi Kyokai:** 8:30am-5pm.
- **Kobo Daishi Gobyō:** freely accessible at any time, except for the Torodo.
- **Kondo:** 8:30am-5pm. ¥200.
- **Konpon Daito:** 8:30am-5pm. ¥200.
- **Kongobu-ji Temple:** 8:30am-5pm. ¥500.
- **Okuno-in:** feely accessible at any time. Free entrance.
- **Torodo:** 6am-5:30pm. Free entrance.



# TAKING A MOMENT FOR TOKYO FASHION

BY SAMUEL THOMAS, FASHION EDITOR

What comes to mind upon hearing “Tokyo fashion” will doubtless be different for a Tokyo fashionista than for those outside Japan whose knowledge is limited to two or three Harajuku backstreets. But even long-term residents are forgiven if their first thought is the extremities typified by the zoku fashion tribes that won the world’s attention in the 2000s.

That’s not to say fashion tribes have lost their edge. They absolutely haven’t, even if tourists on safari snapping photos of Gothic Lolas in the wild have pushed the groups back to events they originated from. Rather, the truth is that they never were all that representative to begin with. These groups have always been on the fringes of fashion, and all the better for it, too. As punk’s watered-down ubiquitous presence in mainstream fashion can attest, popularity is frequently a threat to authenticity. Still, subversion will always have currency, and only the most jaded observer is going to protest that.

However, there’s another side to the city and its fashion, and it’s the one staring you right in the face—on your commute, in your *combin*i. And that is the ubiquitous mainstream. The problem in paying attention to it is that in many other cities, the subtle aesthetics that color local character aren’t distinctive enough to really capture the imagination.

Yet, Japan—and Tokyo in particular—remains a pastiche of distinctive fashion that those from the outside have no problem identifying. The swaggering *tobi* trousers of day laborers, the dated but endearing “office lady” uniforms, and even the average salaryman does well—or better than most—in making sure that their suit at least fits, to comply with social stigma-enforcing standards, if not fashion.

Interestingly, a quick glance at Japanese fashion magazines reveals that Tokyoites are very

astute at recognizing these outsider aesthetics in others. *Popeye* magazine in particular takes great delight in celebrating British postmen and New York garbage collectors as fashionistas, and yet tellingly they seldom turn that gaze on their own city streets.

That is why **Fashion Moment Tokyo**, a new project from the ever-prescient maestros of Tokyo fashion, Yoshikazu Yamagata and Mikio Sakabe, was the revelation it was. The duo curated a presentation for a guerilla showing in Shibuya’s Hikarie of four young designers, with support from department store Parco, in conjunction with the Tokyo New Age group that is the face of the current zeitgeist. What united the Fashion Moment Tokyo group was their nods to the mainstream fashion that walks the streets daily yet captures those moments we’re familiar with in fashion form.

Young brand Pitecan Thropus took the lead with a series of ensembles that capture Tokyo’s dour singletons in motion: depressed office workers with saggy suits and umbrellas, well-to-do types that have known better days

in ’80s boxy suits and clinging on to Isetan bags, which the designer paired with references to train hand grips. As a centerpiece, we find bedraggled single mothers in washed-out cardigans and clutching combin bags. Not a look that would be considered aspirational, but as a perfect observation on the aesthetics that surround us in daily life, it was surprisingly warm: a different conception of fashion that isn’t going to try to sell us a lifestyle out of reach, but rather an appreciation for what we have already.

The ultra-cute Yuka moved to the *kawaii* that saturates the city, building a dollhouse as installation, and making her models mounds of frills with little punctuation. It was a logical conclusion of the pervasive tastes of the moment, but far from holding on to the box freshness of a new Licca-chan doll, it was the washed-out palette of a well-loved doll, a dose of reality in the dream.

Daisuke Shimura went with a collection inspired by the fashion that girls wear when they come from the countryside to Tokyo, capturing the posturing and try-hard aesthetic that separate those raised in the metropolis from their *inaka* peers. Finally, Bunka Fashion College graduate Hidaka asked us to remember what we already know in fashion, presenting an anti-trend collection built on tweeds and items out of sync with fashion cycles that recalled Tokyo creativity to make style from just about anything.

Time will tell whether this subversion will capture the imagination of Japan or the world beyond in the same way as the instancy of the sub-cultures did, but at the very least, take this moment to appreciate the nuances that truly encapsulate the full range of Tokyo fashion.







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# THE REVENANT

FEATURED MOVIE

**T**he title is derived from the French “*revenir*,” which means “to return,” and in its noun form, it means “someone who has returned.” The inference is ... from the dead.

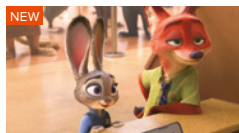
A trapper’s guide in the 1820s Old West is horribly mauled by a grizzly bear. His comrades, assigned to stay with him and bury him

if necessary, however, don’t like his chances, kill his son and leave him for dead. But fueled by his need to find and punish those who did him wrong, he clings to life. It’s mid-winter, mind you. The movie is so cold, you may want to bring along an extra layer.

So it’s man versus nature, but so much more. This is a difficult film to categorize. It is of course a tale of survival and revenge. But it’s done so beautifully that you could call it an art-house action-thriller. Terrence Malick-meets-Sam Peckinpah.

Leonardo DiCaprio took home an Oscar for this role, and I have rarely seen an actor so committed. And it is a testament to Tom Hardy’s skill as an actor that I didn’t realize the villain was he until the closing credits. The director is Alejandro G. Iñárritu (*Oscar*) and the cinematographer is Emmanuel Lubezki (ditto).

The bear scene, a fine use of special effects, is almost too intense to watch. But it’s just the beginning of the man’s raw, relentlessly visceral ordeal. Most excellent storytelling. Japanese title: *Revenant: Yomigaerishimono* (156 min)



## ZOOTOPIA

Diminutive Judy Hopps (voice by Ginnifer Goodwin) aspires to be the first bunny cop in the great city of Zootopia.

Despite being relegated to meter-maid duty, she finds an unlikely ally in Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman), a street-hustler fox, in investigating a series of mysterious disappearances. This hugely entertaining Pixar-level effort from Disney Animation contains a great non-preachy message of inclusivity and multiculturalism for kids, and plenty of sly one-liners and sight gags for parents. It’s so vibrantly realized, with such exhaustive background detail, that it may require a second viewing. (108 min)



## ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING

Powerful intergalactic beings decide that the future of humanity on Earth will depend on

what an average schlub (Simon Pegg, bravely struggling) does with the power they will give him to do (see title). The aliens are voiced by the Monty Python crew (who deserve better), and Pegg’s dog by the late, great Robin Williams (ditto). Kate Beckinsale’s the love interest. Pythoner Terry Jones’s derivative one-joke misfire is unforgivably feeble, painfully absurd and pretty much a waste of its considerable comic firepower. Only for moviegoers who will watch absolutely anything, like film critics. Japanese title: *Miracle Neil!* (85 min)



## CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

Iron Man wants to curb a perceived destructive vigilantism and place the Avengers under UN

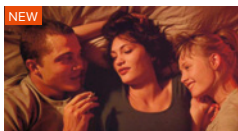
control. Captain America thinks that would hinder their evil-fighting autonomy. Factions form and fight. All this latest Avengers outing had to do was be better than *Age of Ultron*. It’s more dramatically coherent and, for want of a better word, mature. I realize internal strife is built in to the title, but this “team” still spends way too much time fighting one another. OK, superhero movies are subjective. I was not edified or particularly entertained, but many still into the genre thought it was pretty good. (146 min)





### SEA OF TREES

A depressed Matthew McConaughey travels to Japan's Aokigahara "suicide forest," where he meets a similarly inclined Ken Watanabe. They bond, become injured and lost, and are soon, ironically, fighting for their lives. It takes 45 seconds for Ken to explain his despair ("I was demoted"), and the rest of this booed-at-Cannes trainwreck from Gus Van Sant to explain Matt's. A fake and forced suicide drama, a *maa-maa* survival adventure and a terminal illness, all topped off by a bit of insipid quasi-supernatural flummery you'd expect from M. Night Shyamalan. Feeling suicidal? This one will bore you to death. (110 min)



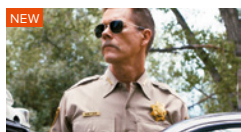
### LOVE

In narcissistic art-house pornographer Gaspar Noé's latest journey up his own ass, a young American falls in lust/love with a Parisian hottie, and they have good-looking (unsimulated) sex. Then they talk about themselves and have more sex (in 3-D no less). Repeat and repeat again. He gets another girl pregnant, hottie walks out, and the rest of the movie is this misogynistic, self-pitying sad sack moaning about his lost love. The acting is amateur, none of the characters is likable, the writing's infantile, and it's way too long. Two-word review: f\*\*\*ing boring. Heavily blotted by the censors here. (135 min)



### THE 5TH WAVE

The first half hour of this (yet another) dystopian alien-invasion tale for teens goes well, but it soon devolves into a derivative, increasingly illogical, and hokey mess. Chloë Grace Moretz brings all her talents to the lead, but no amount of *Kick-Ass* empowerment can breathe any life into this colossally dull and derivative waste of celluloid. Several second-act reveals (nice way of saying "jack around") are dopey to the point of hilarity, but do nothing to regenerate interest already lost. As it stumbles to its conclusion, it offers up an almost insulting setup for a highly unlikely sequel. (112 min)



### COP CAR

A couple of rebellious pre-teen kids happen upon the apparently abandoned title vehicle in the woods, and decide to take it for a joy ride. It wouldn't be much of a movie if they didn't get more than they bargained for. This occasionally vicious low-budget indie just motors along through a variety of fun plot twists, sometimes powered solely by its own originality. Kevin Bacon, in a silly moustache, exercises his darkly comic side as the bent but not-too-smart sheriff the car belongs to. Jon Watts's direction is lean and effective, and he keeps it real within its oddball parameters. Well worth a look. (88 min)



### ROOM

A kidnapped young woman (Oscar winner Brie Larson, *Short Term 12*) is held captive and repeatedly raped for seven years, giving birth to a son after two (a phenomenal Jacob Tremblay). When the boy turns five, they take desperate action. In lesser hands, this could have been a lurid, true-crime drama. But this is about the nature of freedom and the startling wonder of experiencing the world for the very first time. Scripted by Emma Donoghue from her acclaimed novel and directed by Lenny Abrahamson (*Frank*) without sensation or sentimentality, this is a unique cinematic experience. (118 min)



### YOUTH

In this witty and wise, artful and ardent study of ageing and creativity, a retired composer (Michael Caine) and a film director (Harvey Keitel), sojourning at an exclusive Swiss resort, talk about life: what lasts, what doesn't, and what matters. It's an emotionally rich cinematic essay that kind of does what it wants, but there are rewards aplenty for those willing to just go with the flow and enjoy the superb acting, imagery, and dialogue. Sounds arty, but Paolo Sorrentino, clearly an admirer of Fellini, manages to pull it all together. Also Paul Dano, Rachel Weisz, and a brave Jane Fonda. Japanese title: *Grand Finale* (118 min)



### SICARIO

A mesmerizingly filmed, visceral yet cerebral, morally ambiguous, existential art-house action-suspense thriller with a message. Now, that's a tall order for any filmmaker, but Denis Villeneuve (*Prisoners*) comes close. An experienced but naive (it makes sense by the film's end) female FBI agent (Emily Blunt) joins a cross-agency team headed by an enigmatic spook (Josh Brolin) and gets an eye-opening, close-up look at America's covert post-"war on drugs" doings. Blunt polishes her "action heroine" filmography, but it's Benicio Del Toro (never scarier) that you'll remember. The title means "hitman" in Spanish. Japanese title: *Borderline* (121 min)



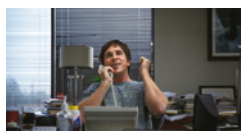
### SPOTLIGHT

This is of course the deeply satisfying, 2016 Best Picture Oscar-winning story of how a crack team of reporters at *The Boston Globe* exposed the sinful behavior of the Catholic Church in ignoring or covering up systemic sexual abuse by pedophile priests around the world. It does not brag or glamorize its subjects, who would agree that, in the endangered field of investigative journalism, the process is more important than the reward. The marvel is that Tom McCarthy (*The Station Agent*, *The Visitor*) could fashion such a suspenseful movie from this restrained journalistic procedural. An absolute must-see. Japanese title: *Spotlight: Seiki no Scoop* (128 min)



### MR. HOLMES

Bill Condon's (*Gods and Monsters*) revisionist film depicts the renowned detective Sherlock Holmes, now 93, retired these 30 years, facing possible dementia, teaching bee-keeping to the fatherless son of his housekeeper (Laura Linney), and trying to remember the details of his last case. There are a few amusing insights regarding the fictitious detective of Watson's dime novels versus this, the "real" one. Ian McKellen is alone worth the ticket price, and there are some unhurried rewards here. But the dramatic game is not afoot. Too many bland, overlapping stories that don't mesh, and a general dourness overall. (104 min)



### THE BIG SHORT

A movie about the 2008 subprime mortgage meltdown that's sobering and infuriating but also informative and relentlessly entertaining. This bit of edu-tainment crackles with wit, irreverence and an oddball energy, and its whacky approach tells the story much more memorably than any straight drama. The characters sometimes break the "fourth wall" and directly address the audience, and entirely unrelated celebrities are pressed into service to offer mini-lessons. The final message is appropriately brilliant and chilling. Wall Street is not fixed yet. You leave the theater enraged, amused, and thinking. Japanese title: *Money Short: Kareinaru Daigyakuten* (132 min)



### THE WHOLE TRUTH

The good news is that finally a movie is being released in Japan before the rest of the world. The bad news is that it's a great big Keanu Reeves turkey. He plays a hotshot lawyer—and if you buy that, I've got some nice ocean-front property in Arizona I want to show you—charged with defending a 17-year-old kid who has admitted to killing his father (and Jim Belushi, too!). Also Renée Zellweger, nearly unrecognizable from her *Bridget Jones/Chicago* days. Far as I can tell, the aim was to make the most derivative, boring courtroom drama possible. Succeeds. Big twist ending you can see coming an hour away. Japanese title: *Sajou no Houtei*.



### THE DANISH GIRL

Heavily fictionalized tale of the life of 1920s Danish artist Einar Wegener, later Lili Elbe, an unsung hero(ine) and pioneer of the transgender movement. Eddie Redmayne's the star, but Alicia Vikander steals every scene with her passionate, Oscar-winning performance as Wegener/Elbe's long-suffering but supportive wife Gerda. She's the audience surrogate and absolutely essential to the story. On the minus side, it's a tad self-important, and too tame. I wanted it to have a bigger emotional punch, to get inside its characters' heads. The director is Tom Hooper (*The King's Speech*, *Les Misérables*). (121 min)





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Human Trust Cinema Shibuya (Cocoti Bldg.7,8F 1-23-16, Shibuya-ku; [www.ht-cinema.com](http://www.ht-cinema.com)).

Canadian actress Melanie St-Pierre plays not one, but two identical clones in *Garm Wars: The Last Druid*. Anime legend **Mamoru Oshii directs his first English language effort**, a futuristic tale of clone armies fighting over the world's remaining clean air. When Khara23 gets separated from the battle, she must fend for herself. On from May 20 at Aeon Cinema Itabashi (Tokumaru 2-6-1, Itabashi-ku; [www.aeoncinema.com/cinema/itabashi](http://www.aeoncinema.com/cinema/itabashi)).

Human Trust Cinema in Shibuya presents a one-week return of the 2011 documentary *Pina*, on **modern dance legend Pina Bausch**. German director Wim Wenders long planned a collaboration with the dancer, but it hadn't come together by the time of her passing in 2009. He decided to go ahead anyway, filming her troupe in high-definition 3-D, and drawing on archive footage of Bausch. On through May 6. (Cocoti Bldg.7,8F 1-23-16, Shibuya-ku; [www.ht-cinema.com](http://www.ht-cinema.com)).

**T**hings seem to be going well for the title character of *Victoria* (Laia Costa), a **Spanish woman who recently moved to Berlin**.

But things can go downhill in the course of a single night, especially after she learns that the guys she meets clubbing owes cash to some pretty shady characters. The next thing she knows, she is being pulled into a bank heist. Director Sebastian Schipper captures the whole night in a single 138-minute take. Mostly in English with a bit of German. Starting May 7 at Image Forum

in Shibuya (2-10-2 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku; [www.imageforum.co.jp](http://www.imageforum.co.jp))

The bold, colorful **flower prints of textile company Marimekko** are so popular around Tokyo, one could be forgiven for thinking that it is a Japanese brand. It was actually the brainchild of one of Finland's most famous women, Armi Ratia, whose life is explored in the new film *Armi Alive!* In the multi-layered, meta biopic Minna Haapkylä plays both the entrepreneur and an actress preparing to play Ratia in a stage play. On from May 14 at



© 2015 Oy Bufo Ab

EIGA

## I AM A HERO

BY ROB SCHWARTZ

**Z**ombie movies have been loping out of Japan recently. Examples include last year's *Z Island* and 2013's *Miss Zombie* by much-heralded director Sabu. The present work, based on a blockbuster *manga* of the same name, remarkably crosses over from B-movie Land to big-budget, well-acted dramedy of first-class standards. This really should be no surprise as director Shinsuke Sato has previously made fascinating art-house flicks (*Sand Clock*) as well as major tent-pole hits (*Gantz*, *Gantz: Perfect Answer*). In addition the lead here, Yo Oizumi is one of the hottest and most talented young actors in Japan today. The pic starts off very *Shaun of the Dead*-like as Hideo (Oizumi) leads a comically drab existence as an assistant manga-drawer with highly dissatisfied girlfriend Tekko (Miho Suzuki). The deadpan humor is delicious. It takes him a while to notice that the zombie plague (which they



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call *zoquun* or ZQN) is descending on Tokyo. Once Tekko turns into a beast and his office is overrun, the ne'er-do-well Hideo must escape the city with high school girl Hiromi (Kasumi Arimura). They end up at a Fuji outlet mall with nurse Tsugumi (Masami Nagasawa), fighting both zombies and power-crazed humans run-

ning the survivors camp there, in *Lord of the Flies* fashion. Will Hideo become the hero he's always dreamed of? Managing to make a zombie movie touching, funny, emotional, and tense is no small feat, but Sato pulls it off. This is a mini-masterpiece, with many festival awards to its name. Go see it. (126 min)





# MORGAN FISHER

**U.K. musician  
extraordinaire on Queen,  
Tokyo, and concerts at  
home**

BY LAURIER TIERNAN

**A**fter decades of touring the world with some of Britain's best, English musician Morgan Fisher has made Tokyo his residence. *Metropolis* spent some time with the London native, who has played with the likes of Queen, to learn about his incredible journey.

**When did you start playing piano?**

I first played a piano at my grandmother's house when I was six. When I was eight, we moved house and bought our own piano ... and I had regular lessons once a week from age 10 to 14. Then I discovered The Beatles, and everything changed.

**And by the mid-'60s, you were playing for The Love Affair?**

I was playing with them by 1966, before they were called "The Love Affair." When I was 17, we released an album that didn't do much, so

my parents insisted that I finish high school. I then left the band for a year, during which they had a number-one hit. When I finally got out of school, they said, "Please come back to the band," so I went from zero to stardom in seconds.

**And in the early '70s you were playing with Mott the Hoople.**

In 1973, I was with them, and on my way to America for the first time.

**What was your favorite event between your time with Mott the Hoople and touring with Queen?**

When punk happened, it just felt right to go indie and make my own home studio. I really enjoyed it.

**What was your favorite memory of touring with Queen?**

Freddie, basically, because he was hilarious. The best time with Freddie was when it was just him and the audience. He would sing [vocal lines] at the audience, who tried to sing them back to him, and he would increase their difficulty until the audience just cracked up laughing. It was different every night, so that's my favorite memory of Queen.

**Your music evolved into something different**



**every night, like what Freddie did in those vocal exchanges with the audience.**

Well, I felt a lack of fulfillment just staying in the music business, which I had done—without a vacation—since high school. I needed a break, so I went to India and meditated for four months, and that changed everything. I became a vegetarian, got healthy ... and more and more, I went towards the improvising side of music, which felt more real to me.

**How did you end up in Japan?**

I tried living in L.A., but couldn't find what I wanted there. Then one day, as I was looking at a map of America in a book, I turned the page and there was Japan. Within minutes, I had decided to move here and start over from zero. And from day one, it felt right.

**Could you tell us a bit about your series of 100 concerts at Super Deluxe?**

I set about doing monthly concerts there that were free, so I could maintain my artistic liberty.

The only reason I stopped doing it at the 100th one is because it stopped being a challenge.

**So you decided to do house concerts in your home studio, to start afresh?**

Yes.

**What's different about these new home concerts?**

It gives me access to more instruments, and I have a screen on which I like to project my light paintings. I also

think people are quite moved to be able to enjoy this [improvisational] music in such a personal setting.

**Due to limited seating, Fisher recommends making reservations to attend his monthly home-studio concerts by e-mailing him directly via his Facebook page or his homepage: [www.facebook.com/morganicfisher](http://www.facebook.com/morganicfisher) or [www.morgan-fisher.com](http://www.morgan-fisher.com)**





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# BIG RIVER

## Mark Twain's Mississippi flows into Tokyo

BY GEORGE PETERS

The world that formed along the Mississippi River in pre-Civil War Missouri, vividly illustrated in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, might appear far removed from present-day Tokyo. The fictional town of Saint Petersburg, modeled after Twain's hometown of Hannibal, maintains a history and upholds a culture that are distinctly American, after all.

Yet Huck Finn's quest to find his place in his environment, answers, and connection is one that's relevant anywhere. This, paired with Japan's long-held fascination with Americana aesthetics, makes Tokyo a fitting audience for a retelling of Twain's revered if not controversial novel.

"The themes [the novel] explores are not limited to history, or to America," says actor, voice actor, and director Hannah Grace, who is working on bringing Twain's novel to the Tokyo stage.

A native of Kentucky, Grace moved to Tokyo in 2011. She fell in love with the city upon visiting for a month after graduating university, where she majored in theater performance.

Grace has since enjoyed a fruitful career as a professional actor in Japan, appearing regularly on stage, television, and film. Her most notable work to date is assuming the role of Ms. Scott on popular NHK drama *Hanako to Anne*, which garnered her a large following in Japan.

However, theater remains Grace's passion. She is presently directing the Tokyo International Players' upcoming May production of *Big River*, a Tony Award-winning musical adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*, to bridge the South wherein she grew up with her present home country.

With music being integral to Southern culture, it made more sense to bring the musical to Japan, rather than a straight-play adaptation of the novel.

"It's so representative of the culture and

pathos of the American South," explains Grace. "The South is also a place where you don't usually talk about your emotions, but you do sing about them. It's a Southern tradition to express your deepest feelings with a country ballad or gospel song. So [doing the] musical makes perfect sense, given the setting."

She adds that the musical, which consists of gospel and country songs penned by legendary country crooner Roger Miller, truly evokes the spirit of the Mississippi River region. Grace explains that Miller understood the mix of humor and drama Twain was known for.

And while it has its light moments, the musical never brushes over the divided, pro-slavery setting in which it takes place; and Grace has led workshops with her cast to better understand the concepts of segregation and privilege.

"The Deep South was a stratified society of rigid social classes and intense racial divide. As we did the workshops, my cast asked extremely

intelligent questions grappling with the reasons why people go along with ideas and systems that to many of us today are unthinkable."

Because the script was written for an American audience that already understood the history of the South, Grace has worked with her cast extensively to make this aspect of American history visible in her production, primarily for Japanese audiences.

That TIP's *Big River* comprises a cast of various nationalities and age groups also

contributes to the show's narrative.

"Ultimately, the story is bigger than the history of American slavery. It's about coming to understand and be changed by someone different than you. It's about the nature of friendship, and how to find your path in a world that's all upside down. These themes are universal."

While the musical delves into some heavy places—interspersed with light humor, in Mark Twain fashion—Grace hopes audiences can leave inspired, walking from the theater with "hope—and [having had] a good time."

***Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* May 19-22, various times. ¥2,500-4,500. With Japanese subtitles. [www.tokyoplayers.org](http://www.tokyoplayers.org)**



Photo by Kenji Mori



Photo by Rodger Sonomura



Photo by Rodger Sonomura



TECH

# GAME ON!

“Why are video games so interesting?”

BY ANDY HUGHES

Even though Japan is renowned for being home to the leading innovators in video games historically, the first Game On exhibit was held at the Barbican Centre, U.K., back in 2002. Now, it finally makes its glorious debut appearance in Tokyo after so many years.

Taking place in the stunning surroundings of the Miraikan, this exhibition adds another excuse, as well as the life-sized Gundam statue and the view of the Rainbow Bridge, for you to trek to the manmade island of Odaiba.

To be honest with you, I was hesitant. The Tokyo Game Show last September was an overly crowded and odorous affair. I spent most of my time with my face crushed and entombed inside a rather portly stranger's armpit and didn't get to play any games because of the endless queues. With the aforementioned chap's sweat bubbling in my nose, I looked for the exit and vowed to never frequent such an event again. However, since Game On looked to be a smaller event and more focused on retro games, I decided to give it a shot. As a precaution, I fashioned a pair of nose buds made out of cotton wool and set out to see the show.

I was glad I made the effort. For a start, it



wasn't so crowded, and every console under the sun was on show—and most were playable, as well as some very well-maintained original arcade cabinets. From the classics *Pong* and *Space Invaders* to *Street Fighter II*, *Parappa the Rapper*, and all the way up to current games such as *Halo*, *Guilty Gear Xrd*, *Minecraft*, and *Into the Deep* on the soon-to-be-released PlayStation VR, games of all genres were there to be sampled.

One game that was an unexpected source of curiosity was *Muscle March* on the Nintendo Wii. This game was drawing many amused stares and the aim of the game was to use the Wii remote to copy a scantily-clad bodybuilder's poses as you chase him through a city, smashing through walls, and causing



general mischief. Later, I was happy to see that this game was available for download on the Wii's virtual console. A must buy!

For those interested in the artistic side of game development, there were some fascinating concept drawings for *Jak and Daxter*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and a replica of the development board for *Grand Theft Auto III*. Being a big GTA fan since the first game, this was especially cool to see.

Within half an hour of being there, I had blown up four small Japanese children and their father in a six-player bout of *Bomberman*, spinning-piledrived my girlfriend's skull into concrete with *Street Fighter II*'s Zangief, and been laughed at by an old man as I crashed into a tree playing *Super Hang On*. That game was just as difficult as I remember it being when I was a kid. I was more of a *Road Rash II* fan anyway ...

If you arrive early enough, you'll be in with the chance to obtain tickets which allow you to try one of the three games on show for the PlayStation VR. I arrived in the afternoon, which was too late to get a ticket, so I spent some time in the queue, hoping for a cancellation so I could have a try. After around 20 minutes of gawping around and quietly giggling because of how silly everyone looked with their VR helmets on, I decided to give up and went for a quick game of *Pong*. I was surprised to see how popular this old game was. With a long queue filled with gamers of all ages, it just shows that this simple game is still just as addictive and competitive as it was when it was first released.

So, if you want to sample the PlayStation VR, get there as early as you can to be in with a chance to get tickets. Also, if you buy your tickets at Lawson, you can save yourself a couple hundred yen to buy yourself a bottle of melon soda or sausage on a stick. The show runs until May 30 and is a must-see. Whether you want to learn more about the cultural impact and history of video games, or, like me, just want to play games from your childhood on their original platforms for nostalgia kicks, this exhibition is well worth a gander.

**Game On: Why are Video Games so Interesting? Until May 30, 10am-5pm (last entry 4:30pm). ¥650-¥1,500. The Miraikan (The National Museum of Emerging Sciences and Technologies). Odaiba. [www.miraikan.jst.go.jp/en/spexhibition/gameon/](http://www.miraikan.jst.go.jp/en/spexhibition/gameon/)**







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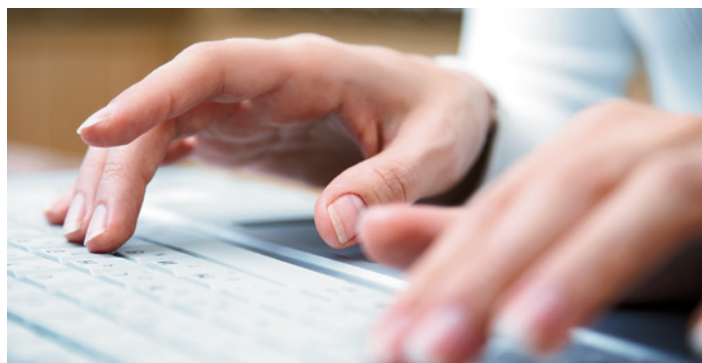
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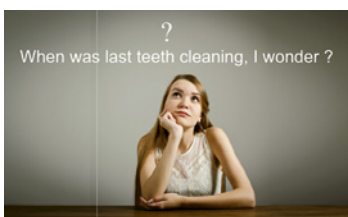
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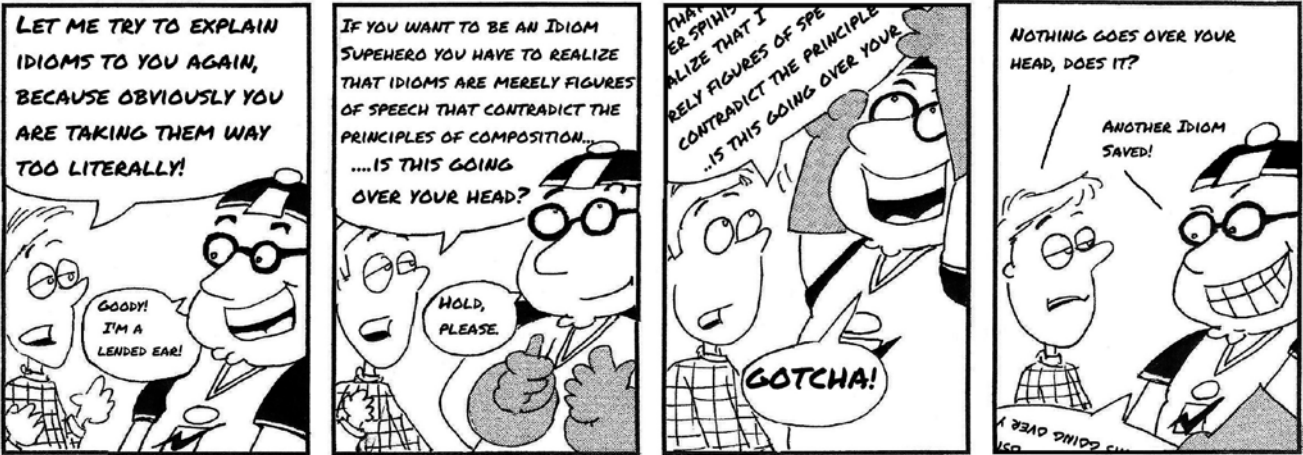
for charity for children with incurable diseases. A Dream a Day in Tokyo is a registered incorporated public interest association providing support for children and their families. We aim to help them create special memories by inviting families to Tokyo for a few days, all expenses paid. We are seeking a volunteer fundraiser to assist our managing director in approaching international corporations and organizations in Japan. Requirements: native-level English, good Japanese; attendance at a weekly meeting in Tokyo; experience in sales and/or public relations preferred. For details, contact Tsuda-san at [tsuda@guesthouse.or.jp](mailto:tsuda@guesthouse.or.jp).



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♥ Love ¥ Money ♣ Luck

**ARIES**  
Mar 21-Apr 20 ♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

May brings surprises. If you have thrown yourself into an important project, it's about to go in the direction of your dreams. The stabilizing aspect which before may have cramped your style is now just what you need. Success—you shall have it! Look to Taurus and those whose conservative approach bring clues for your next awesome installment.

**TAURUS**  
Apr 21-May 21 ♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

May is your month to ensure the earth does not rock beneath you—or only rock when you want it to, at least. The power is in how you define yourself. The wounding, surprisingly, comes out of the blue or from groups that have asked for your help. That may not seem fair, of course, so make sure you're wearing your metaphorical armor for any built-up but unexpected resistance.

**GEMINI**  
May 22-Jun 21 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣

You do things a hundred heartfelt ways in May. Still, it doesn't compare to the laughter you deserve to enjoy. Luxuries, financial stability, and cozy catnaps—who doesn't desire those?—may seem like whispers blown past like blossoms in the breeze. Vesta, Mercury, the Sun and Venus in your solar 12th house are really preparing your inner self for your outer expression.

**CANCER**  
Jun 22-Jul 23 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣

This is a month to put your stakes in the ground. If there is a place or situation worth considering, in May, it's worth hanging in there for. Vesta, Mercury, the Sun, and Venus help to achieve your goals with power players and luxury-lovers. Remember, not every book matches its cover. Those who are understated may be cautious about showing off their true but considerable assets.

**LEO**  
Jul 24-Aug 23 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

You have quite a bit of charisma, even when it's not uppermost in your mind. May is changeable for you, as it starts out weighted in your career and relationship sectors, then spreads out to other areas. Your choices move into realms that reflect aspects of your childhood. Where you live will certainly keep your interest, as you find your journey has just been considerably upgraded!

**VIRGO**  
Aug 24-Sep 23 ♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣

While Virgo is the sign of discernment and details—to the max—you may surprise yourself with statements you make in May. You're particularly intuitive now. Mixed with the compassion you've been feeling of late, it just seems "natural" to be more open. Holding back hasn't been rewarding, and your energy is too precious to lose. It's more valuable if kept in your own heart's safe and shared when it flows on its own.

**LIBRA**  
Sep 24-Oct 23 ♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

Libra is not synonymous with balance; Libra expresses a desire to help finances, friendships, and feelings move into balance. The harmony which you seek is, of course, within you. Instead of using your awesome intellectual prowess to persuade others to join you, go ahead and show them. Being a role model works well for you in May, and brings you a bit of a following.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct 24-Nov 22 ♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

It's so tempting to take the Scorpionic approach of "eliminate," when in reality your soul-searing search brings you to the higher levels of your own power. As you remove any hurt or pain that has soaked into your spirit, you make space for the light to lift you into more glamorous Scorpio playgrounds. In May, you get your own back simply by staying focused on the great things you deserve.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov 23-Dec 22 ♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣

As a wild and free spirit, you may have wondered why you're being offered these long-term corals to kick around in. Is it a trap? You may wonder. Will the walls close in on you if you stay for too long? What you are on the inside is reflected by your relationships outside of you. A long-term vision gives you the basis for an excellent May experience. Stability is in the making!

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec 23-Jan 20 ♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣

If only you would let yourself fall—in love, that is. You're cautious, and breaking the rules of propriety may seem like work. You're right, of course: it will be, at first. But consider the freedom of tearing apart those nets which kept you all webbed up with no place to go. At least with current offers, you can test the travel and temperatures to see if it's really your cup of tea.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan 21-Feb 19 ♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣

Being optimistic doesn't mean things fall easily into place, as you are well aware. Still, May is your month to really go for it. Quantum-leaping is well advised, with Venus, the Sun, Mercury, and Vesta in your solar fourth house. Where you live, what you eat, and which lifestyle you want to embrace ... these are the things blessed—and tested—to create a dream reality just for you!

**PISCES**  
Feb 20-Mar 20 ♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣

You are now in a position to enjoy the decisions that make your ideas the ones that will stick. Sitting back or having someone else run the show is definitely not your idea of May. Venus, the Sun, Mercury, and Vesta are all in your solar third house of communication. They'll bring in money, too, so you're popular, as well as a respected philosopher.





Illustration by Christi Rochin

## HALF THE WORLD AWAY

### Being Biracial in Japan

BY MERINDA AZUSA BUTLER-MASUDA



**B**eing biracial in Australia didn't really affect me much during my eight years there. They could definitely tell that I wasn't "fully Australian," but that didn't seem to bother people around me.

No one really pointed out the fact that I was "Asian." Those that did would ask if I was Chinese, or would tell me that I had interesting eyes. That annoyed me back in the day, but I am over it now.

Moving to Japan, I was surprised at how much of an outsider I was. Before moving here, I thought the people would be nice. And don't get me wrong, Japan is full of the nicest people

in the world! But for a 12-year-old outsider going in mid-semester in elementary school, it wasn't exactly like that.

You'd think that children wouldn't understand "discrimination" at such a young age, but they do—they really do. As soon as I got to my new school, I felt out of place. So many people were looking at me like I was different; a "freak."

When I went up before everyone to introduce myself, I could hear people snickering. I really didn't want to be there, but I had no choice.

I did meet this lovely girl, however. She could speak English, so I felt a little better and not totally alone. We immediately became friends and stuck close to each other for the duration of the semester. I came at the start of January, meaning there were only three months left until graduation. Thank God!

I went about my regular classes and Japanese lessons. I couldn't speak any Japanese at that time, nor could I read or write. I think these are some of the reasons why I got bullied; they probably thought that because I couldn't understand anything, they could say whatever they pleased.

Those three months were unpleasant, but they gave me an idea of what being biracial in Japan is all about.

Thankfully, things got a lot better after graduation. I entered middle school, and the girl I befriended also went there, so it was comforting having a friendly face. The students and teachers were kind and understood that my



**IF YOU ARE BIRACIAL AND GOING THROUGH A ROUGH TIME WITH EITHER YOUR SOCIAL LIFE OR ACADEMIC LIFE, PLEASE JUST TRY TO STICK WITH IT AND TRY YOUR BEST. ”**

Japanese was very limited, so they were patient and helpful.

However, my grades were appalling. I was so shocked to see how bad my test scores were. I used to have excellent grades in Australia. But here, I just couldn't understand anything. Since my experience with my elementary school, I just wanted to move back Down Under.

That influenced my learning process, unlike my brother, who loved being here and had picked it up rather quickly. But as I went to high school, my Japanese improved, as well as my appreciation for this country. I could understand my teachers better, and by my final year, I had the best grades I'd ever gotten.

It wasn't just my understanding of the language that grew, but also the understanding of the culture and society of Japan. What I said earlier is true about how Japan is full of the nicest people in the world, but I was never fully accepted into their society. I always felt left out. I was always "that gaijin."

In Japan I was "a gaijin," and in Australia, I was "an Asian." I never really had a place where I was truly accepted as one of their own.

While this made me feel a little lonely, I now look at being biracial as a gift. I've experienced a life most people would never have. I have the best of both worlds, with one foot in Australia, and the other in Japan.

Australia gave me the country life with beautiful nature. Japan gave me the city life and tough experiences that made me who I am today.

With two completely different world experiences, I came out the other end appreciating who I've become.

If you're biracial and going through a rough time with either your social life or academic life, please just try to stick with it and try your best. Trust me; you will be an even better person with a broader knowledge and outlook on either sides. You'll have one foot here, and one foot there.

■ Merinda Azusa Butler-Masuda is an Australian-Japanese high school graduate with a passion for singing and helping others. She has recently moved back to Australia to explore future options.





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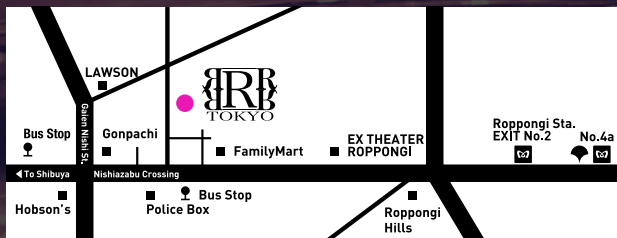
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